



To: **Joint Committee on Finance, Revenue and Bonding**
Legislative Office Building #3700
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

Re: **House Bill 5653 – An Act Establishing an Excise Tax on Ammunition to Provide Funding for Community Gun Violence and Intervention Program Grants**

Position: **Oppose**

Date: **March 3, 2023**

Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Finance, Revenue and Bonding,

My name is Joseph Bachar, and I am the New England States Coordinator for the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF). I respectfully urge you to oppose House Bill 5653 (HB 5653) – legislation that would establish an excise tax on ammunition and dedicate it towards a community gun violence intervention and prevention program. Connecticut's sportsmen and women are the backbone of the funding structure for conservation efforts that benefit wildlife and their habitat throughout the state, as well as the citizenry at large, and HB 5653 is very likely to result in an unintended and consequential diminishment of the state's conservation funding. The intended purpose of this bill – to fund grants through the community gun violence intervention and prevention program – is being pursued through an avenue that levies a significant tax on law-abiding sportsmen and women who are already taxed on these products to provide the conservation funding necessary for the work of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), from which all citizens of the state benefit.

Founded in 1989, CSF is the informed authority across outdoor issues and serves as the primary conduit for influencing public policy. Working with the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus (CSC), the Governors Sportsmen's Caucus (GSC), and the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses (NASC), CSF gives a voice to hunters, anglers, recreational shooters, and trappers on Capitol Hill and throughout state capitols advocating on vital outdoor issues that are the backbone of our nation's conservation legacy.

For more than 85 years, sportsmen and women have been the primary funders of state-level conservation efforts in this state and are thus an important constituency that provides benefits for all Connecticut residents. In 2021 alone, Connecticut's sportsmen and women generated over \$15 million dollars for conservation through revenue derived from license sales and excise taxes on sporting-related goods (including ammunition) in the unique "user pays – public benefits" structure known as the American System of Conservation Funding (ASCF). The funds collected through this program are the lifeblood of state fish and wildlife agencies, including the DEEP – the primary manager of Connecticut's fish and wildlife resources. These critical conservation dollars fund a variety of efforts including enhanced fish and wildlife habitat and populations, recreational access to public and private lands, shooting ranges and boat access

facilities, wetlands protection and its associated water filtration and flood retention functions, and improved soil and water conservation – all which benefit the public at large, not just sportsmen and women.

Enacted in 1937, the Pittman-Robertson Act redirected previously existing excise taxes on firearms and ammunition to a dedicated fund to be used specifically for wildlife conservation purposes. Once collected, the taxes are deposited into the Wildlife Restoration Account, which is administered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Under the Pittman-Robertson Act and per the Firearms and Ammunition Excise Tax, firearms and ammunition are subjected to a 10-11% excise tax.¹ Ultimately, it was sportsmen and women who decided to avail themselves to this excise tax – a choice prompted in sole consideration of the interest and betterment of the nation's fish and wildlife, and the habitats that they rely on. By subjecting purchasers of ammunition to an additional tax per round, HB 5653 will contribute to curtailing sales and therefore deflect much-needed conservation dollars away from the DEEP, inhibiting the Department from effectively carrying-out its mission. Arguably, the parties most significantly harmed by this bill will be the recreational shooters who will be subjected to additional taxes, but all citizens will be negatively impacted by the loss of conservation dollars.

It is widely recognized that recreational target shooters, who per-capita, spend even more money on firearms and ammunition than hunters, are the financial keystone for the ASCF. According to a National Shooting Sports Foundation estimate, “80 percent of Pittman-Robertson excise tax contributions are generated by sales attributed to recreational shooting.”² By implementing additional excise taxes, HB 5653 will discourage participation in the time-honored sporting pursuits of hunting and recreational shooting, which given the decline in participation over the last several decades, is a step in the wrong direction. There is no question that conservation funding in this nation needs immediate support; imposing this tax and disincentivizing spending on the very items whose sales drives conservation funding is a step in the wrong direction.

In recognition of the negative bearings that HB 5653 would have on Connecticut's sportsmen and women, along with the loss in conservation funds that the state would likely experience as a result of this bill, CSF stands in firm opposition. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this issue. Should you require additional information on this, or other sportsmen-related topics, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,



Joseph Bachar
Coordinator, New England States | Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
110 North Carolina Ave, SE | Washington, DC 20003
jbachar@congressionalsportsmen.org | 202-938-1492

¹ *FAET Reference Guide Firearms and Ammunition Excise Tax*. Accessed on February 27, 2020. <https://www.ttb.gov/firearms/reference-guide#1>.

² *NSSF Commends Congress's Passage of 'Range Bill.'* Accessed on January 15, 2020. <https://www.nssf.org/nssf-commends-congresss-passage-of-range-bill/>.